

Commissioner District Redistricting FAQs

1. How are the members of the Redistricting Board appointed?

Three members of the Board are appointed by the County Commissioners. These appointees are selected from a pool of citizens that apply for the position. Applicants are chosen based on interest, availability, and experience; applications do not ask applicants to list their race, nor their party affiliation. Two members of the Board are appointed by the Democratic Central Committee, and two members are appointed by the Republican Central Committee. None of the appointees are permitted to be employees of the County or the State.

2. What are the responsibilities of the Redistricting Board?

According to § 27-1(B) of the Charles County Code, the Redistricting Board has the following charge:

[T]he Redistricting Board shall establish the tentative boundaries of the 4 Commissioner Districts after due consideration and investigation within reasonable and lawful guidelines. The Redistricting Board shall give priority consideration to election district lines, as well as to demographics and geography. The Redistricting Board shall set and conduct public hearings in each of the proposed 4 Commissioner Districts after tentative district boundaries have been drawn and defined. Notice of public hearings giving time, date and place shall be published in 2 county newspapers 10 days prior to the public hearings. After all public hearings have been held and a final draft of the districting plan has been completed, the Redistricting Board shall submit the districting plan to the County Commissioners....

3. Does the Redistricting Board have any impact on how the Commissioners are elected, i.e., at-large or by their residency districts?

No. Currently, according to the Charles County Code, § 27-1(A), all of the Commissioners are elected at-large. This means that a resident of the County may vote for each Commissioner, even the Commissioners that do not represent that resident's district. Because the Commissioners are elected at-large, the Redistricting Board's task is to determine the lines of the Commissioner Districts that each Commissioner will later represent. If there is a change in district lines, it may affect who represents your specific district, but it will not affect your ability to vote for any of the Commissioners.

4. When determining the size of Commissioner Districts, does the Redistricting Board use the total population or the voting age population?

As per the July 2, 2009, Opinion of the Maryland Attorney General, the Redistricting Board shall use the total population as gleaned from the 2010 Census. 94 Md. Op. Atty. Gen. 125, 5 (2009). Further, the Redistricting Board used an "adjusted" population in accordance with Maryland law, which requires that federal and state prisoners that were Maryland residents at the time of incarceration be counted, even if they were not physically present in the state at the time of the census.

5. *How does the Redistricting Board determine how the lines should be drawn?*

After each decennial census, the lines for the districts must be reviewed. The goal is for the districts to be reasonably equal in population, with a small margin of difference tolerated under the law (no more than $\pm 5\%$). After the 2010 census, the total population of Charles County was determined to be 146,788, making the ideal population for each district to be 36,697. The districts each had a total population of:

District 1: 36,232, which is 1.3% **less** than the ideal

District 2: 36,950, which is 0.7% **more** than the ideal

District 3: 35,044, which is 4.5% **less** than the ideal

District 4: 38,562, which is 5.1% **more** than the ideal

The goal of the Redistricting Board is to bring all of the percentages to 5% or less, while respecting demographics and geographical lines, as well as election district lines.

6. *What are the general legal standards that the Redistricting Board should apply in carrying out their duty?*

The language found in the County Code is not self-explanatory, but has been interpreted by legal advisors to the Redistricting Board to conform with the “one person, one vote” rule, established by the Supreme Court, and found in the Voting Rights Act at 42 USC § 1973. To avoid violating the rule, the boundaries should be drawn so that districts are reasonably equal in population, contiguous, and relatively compact and regularly shaped. The rule prohibits the creation of districts that result in the dilution of voting power of any class of individual votes. It is important to note that, because the Commissioners are elected at-large, the lines cannot be drawn in a manner that would dilute votes.

7. *What does “contiguous” mean?*

Contiguous means that the precincts that make up the district should all touch. A district may be divided by a river or other body of water, but a district divided by another district would not be considered contiguous.

8. *What does “compact and regularly shaped” mean?*

The district should be drawn in a way so that the people that live in the district have a sense of community with each other. A district would not be adequately compact and regularly shaped if the lines were so convoluted that it would be difficult to figure out who actually lived within the district.

9. *How does the Redistricting Board reconfigure the lines of the Commissioner Districts?*

The Commissioner Districts are comprised of Election Districts, which are comprised of precincts. The precincts are the building blocks of the Commissioner Districts, and if one Commissioner District needs to reduce or increase its population, then a precinct has to be moved. Precincts cannot be divided, so a precinct must be moved into a Commissioner District in its entirety.

10. *Who determines where election precinct lines are drawn?*

According to the Maryland Annotated Code, Election Law Article, § 2-303, the local election boards “create and alter the boundaries for precincts in this county, designate the location for polling places..., and combine or abolish precincts.”